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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

**Secretary of State John Kerry and Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama
At the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission
March 30, 2016
Washington, D.C.**

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, good afternoon and hello, and welcome to the Treaty Room of the State Department. We don't have a treaty to sign today, but we're delighted to be here. I'm really pleased to be joined by my colleague Geoffrey Onyeama, and very happy to welcome his distinguished delegation here today. The importance of today, which is a full day's meeting of the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission, is really underscored by the quality of the participants on both sides and the breadth of the discussion that we are having in the course of the day. Representatives from my government include leaders from the State Department, USAID, the Defense Department, Commerce Department, and several other key agencies. And Jim Entwistle, of course, our outstanding ambassador to Nigeria, is also here, as is the Nigerian Charge d'Affaires Hakeem Balogun, and welcome. And we're happy to have such broad representation at this important dialogue.

Let me just say a word personally about this because I had the occasion to travel twice to Nigeria last year. And I personally became invested in the enormous possibilities of this enormous country which is vital to all of Africa, to all of our interests in so many different ways. And so this morning our two teams focused appropriately on the security issues. In the afternoon, we're going to review issues related to economic development and to governance. And in just a few minutes, we're going to have a working lunch, which will cover probably a little bit of a mix of both. But our delegations have already covered a lot of ground, and they have a lot of ground yet to cover in the rest of today. And I think it's fair to say that we both attach a very high value to this conversation, and we also attach a high value to simply the people-to-people component of this.

We want Nigeria to succeed. And I don't say that with any element of patronizing or arrogant or any kind of view other than the fact that we know there are challenges. You know there are challenges. That's what your election was about. And so we're all aware that the world right now is facing many different challenges in terms of governance in various parts of the world and for various reasons: absence of capital, absence of structure, having to build capacity. These things take time. Nobody is pretending that it's an overnight operation. It wasn't for us. And some people sometimes are very revisionist in America about our own history, but we've gone through some very difficult periods and very difficult issues. We had to write slavery out of our Constitution after it had been written in, and that was no small task, with a Civil War raging around it. So we've been through a history. And what we're trying to do is really share with people the shortcut, if you will – how you can manage to avoid some of the

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mistakes that we've made in the course of our own development in ways that can embrace the hopes and the aspirations of millions upon millions of people. That's what this is about.

And Nigeria is an extraordinary country. It has huge potential, a very rich culture. And it is finding very vibrant expression in every branch of the arts. And like the United States, it is a diverse country with a very large and assertive civil society; and like America, Nigeria is looked to for leadership in confronting some of the starkest challenges of our times.

So it is good news, therefore, that our bilateral relationship is, in fact, healthy and strong. As I mentioned, I went to Nigeria twice last year, first to encourage a free and fair election. And I met then with candidate Buhari – now president – and talked about the challenge of being a challenger and running against an incumbent and how complicated but important it was that this election be free of violence and be fair. And I later went to attend the results of that election, and we all in America salute the people of Nigeria who really made that election what it was. And we salute the outcome, which gave me the privilege of attending President Buhari's inauguration.

Commerce Secretary Pritzker has been among the first senior U.S. officials who have been to Nigeria recently. In her case it was to highlight investment opportunities, and that is a theme that has been reinforced by yesterday's business forum here in Washington.

So the United States, let me be clear, is very encouraged by President Buhari's commitment to an economy that is more diversified, less dependent on a single commodity for export earnings, and that means we need to develop sustainability. Sustainable growth depends on a climate that is welcoming to investment and respectful of the environment and of workers' rights. And we have learned in these last 25, 30 years that it is never a competition between the environment and development. That is a false choice – completely false, and particularly in the context of today's challenge of climate change. You can develop in ways that protect the environment and also are competitive and provide jobs for people.

Now, Nigeria's future is in Nigerians' hands. We respect that. The United States is here to help to meet your needs, to listen to you carefully, to understand what it is that you believe is necessary, and to work with you where we can to implement. Our development assistance this year will top \$600 million, and we are working closely with your leaders – the leaders of your health ministry – to halt the misery that is spread by HIV/AIDS, by malaria, and by TB.

Our Power Africa Initiative is aimed at strengthening the energy sector, where shortage in electricity has frustrated the population and impeded growth.

And our long-term food security program, Feed the Future, is helping to create more efficient agriculture and to raise rural incomes in doing that.

Our Young African Leaders Program, in which many Nigerians participate, is preparing the next generation to take the reins of responsibility. And I will tell you, I have met with young African leaders, I have met with young Asian leaders, I have met with young leaders around the world; it is extraordinary how intelligent, how energized, how focused, how determined these young leaders are to meet the future and to define the future.

And in education, we are working together to try to fight illiteracy, especially in the country's north, where the lack of opportunity has been holding people back, and where the terrorist organization, Boko Haram, has murdered thousands and disrupted the lives of millions.

Let me just say a word about that. It is an outrage that any group anywhere would brainwash young people, including little girls, to strap explosives to their bodies and walk into an open marketplace with the intent of murdering their own families, neighbors, and themselves. That is what Boko Haram does. And that is why these terrorists have to be stopped and why the United States of America and President Obama are deeply committed to help Nigeria in this struggle.

Under President Buhari, Nigeria has been taking the fight to Boko Haram and it has reduced Boko Haram's capacity to launch full-scale attacks. However, the group still remains a threat – a serious threat – to the entire region. And in recent months, our governments have been collaborating on new ways to institute security measures, including counter-IED equipment, improved information sharing, and training and equipping two infantry battalions. Now, I want to be clear, this aid is predicated on the understanding that, even when countering a group as ruthless as Boko Haram, security forces have a duty to set the standard with respect to human rights. One abuse does not excuse another.

Both our governments know that although military action is required to protect civilians from terrorists, the long-term solution requires effective governance and the creation of jobs that give young people a deep stake in the future of their communities.

The threat that is posed by Boko Haram is serious, but it must not – and I really believe this – it will not be allowed to shape Nigeria's future. Nigeria is a country with an almost boundless capacity for economic growth. Believe in that – boundless capacity for economic growth. It has a youthful population that is thoroughly plugged in and citizens who do not hesitate to express their views. Nigeria is a country that is a responsible international partner and well positioned to contribute to the regional and global problem-solving.

But as both President Buhari and President Obama stressed, one of the largest and most stubborn obstacles is the persistence of corruption. To fight it, the United States strongly supports the efforts of institutions like Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to prosecute corruption cases. And we back the role of civil society and of the media in exposing corruption and in advocating for greater transparency.

And we emphasize the message that the United States, in – that the United States, we don't have a holier-than-thou attitude about this. Believe me, we don't. We've had our own challenges with organized crime through some of our history, but we have fought back against it. And we have fought back against it with prosecutors who are above reproach, above the possibility of any kind of interference, and who go after it, and that has made all the difference in the world. You cannot have impunity in your culture – in anybody's culture – and expect to be able to make progress.

The truth is – and I've seen this as Secretary of State and it's been an eye-opener for me – the numbers of countries in the world that are challenged today by corruption where it is stealing the future from young people, stealing the future from all citizens – what happened in Tunisia with a fruit vendor who set himself on fire was not the result of religious indoctrination. It was the

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result of an individual who rebelled against an individual act of corruption by a policeman and who said, “I’ve had enough.”

So all of us need to heed the warning signs, and we emphasize that, as in the United States, the soliciting of a bribe at any level of government cannot be considered business as usual – it is a crime.

America’s first diplomat, Benjamin Franklin, was renowned for a lot of wise sayings, and one of them was simply that, “Energy and persistence conquer all things.” The great advantage in the U.S.-Nigeria relationship is that both of us, both sides bring to the table a huge, deep well of energy and persistence. We are two great countries with a long list of shared goals. And our purpose today is to map out the next steps for cooperation in all of those areas where we need it. Now, I don’t – as I said at the beginning, this doesn’t transform things overnight. But I’ll tell you, absolutely, positively, it moves us steadily forward, it creates momentum in the right direction, and that is good for Nigeria, it’s good for the United States, and frankly, if we can get this right, that will really make a difference to the world. It will be an example of what can be achieved when you have determined leadership that is absolutely committed to getting on a different path and a different road.

So that’s the importance of today – a very, very important meeting, important opportunity, and I look forward to trying to make the most of it with you for the rest of the day. And with that, it’s my great pleasure to turn to Geoffrey and give you the floor, sir. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER ONYEAMA: Thank you very much indeed, Secretary Kerry. It’s a tremendous pleasure for myself as well as my delegation to be here in this beautiful building and beautiful country. We really cannot thank yourself, your government, President Obama, for really the help and the support and the friendship that we have received from you.

You’ve mentioned the fact that you’ve been to Nigeria twice, and of course, you visited Nigeria at a very critical period in the history of our country. We cannot underestimate the impact that your visit and the support of your country has had in shaping the future for Nigeria. As you noted very well, we had really historic elections last year, and up until that point, it was really not very clear which direction things were going to go.

And of course, we’ve had respect for the United States for a very long time. Your system of government is one that we’ve adopted. We had a Westminster model once upon a time, but we threw that aside and embraced the United States model – an expensive model it is too, but we’re struggling as best we can – (laughter) – as best we can with it.

We share the same values and we respect very much what this great country has achieved, and this country has really become a model for all countries in the world. And we aspire to going some ways to emulating this model.

Of course, it has not been easy for us as a country, as a people. We’ve also in a very short period of time gone through our trials and tribulations, as you have – a civil war and numerous coup d’etats and really struggling as a country to find the right path for ourselves. It hasn’t been easy. It hasn’t been easy at all. But the important thing is that we are still one as a country, just as you managed those years back to remain one. And of course, in remaining one, you managed to really change the history of the world in so many ways. We might not be that ambitious, but

we certainly aspire in remaining one to change things in our country and possibly also in our continent.

So we come towards elections. We're extremely fortunate. You mentioned that you met at the time candidate Buhari, and he really has been an inspiration for our country. Of course, he had served at one time as a military head of state, and he has also made about three attempts to become president of the country. Now, as I said this morning, we're a country that really shouldn't be where we find ourselves today economically, technologically, socially. We really – our successive governments have failed our people. A country blessed with such amazing resources – human resources, as you know here in the United States, with a countless number of Nigerians, a lot of them doing extremely well in your country – tremendous human resources and also material resources. And we just have not been able, unfortunately, for any number of reasons, been able to utilize those amazing assets to deliver the kinds of prosperity to our people that they clearly, clearly deserve.

And President Buhari has really persisted. He is somebody, as you all know, whose unimpeachable integrity is respected in Nigeria and around the world. And it was not an easy task for him in opposition to come into power, but as you found also with your incumbent President, anything and everything is possible. And you really just have to have that determination, that faith, that belief, and that drive. And he had that. He had said initially that the last elections was going to be his last, but thankfully for us all, for our country, he didn't, for once, keep to his word. And he went and he came – became the president.

And I said we owe the United States a great debt of gratitude, and yourself. Your coming to Nigeria when you did was extremely important because we were at a crossroads, and it sent a very powerful message that those elections had to be free and fair and that you would tolerate nothing less. It really concentrated the minds of everybody involved, including the election tribunal personnel. And yes, we delivered really historic elections.

Now, we believe where we were at the point of those elections – we were in a very bad place, however one chose – or one chooses to look at it. If we look at the situation of security, we were facing really an existential challenge. We had an insurgency that was overpowering our military and was taking territory, keeping territory, and hoisting flags declaring caliphates. And our government seemed almost powerless to do anything about it – an insurgency, as you noted, that was able to go and kidnap over 200 of our young girls, and yet we were powerless to do anything about it.

If we looked at our economic situation, it was also dire. Notwithstanding the fact that we had had years which oil prices were at about \$140 to the barrel, record limits. But all this was really squandered. And as far as governments was concerned, all we heard about was just the level of corruption, which you have also mentioned, Secretary, in our country. The Nigerian brand was really at the lowest it could possibly be, and this was really the starting point for this government. And thankfully, we had a president who came on board who was absolutely determined that Nigeria should change directions, that we absolutely had to change. And to a certain extent, a lot of the Nigerians really believed that this was the last hope, the last chance, for our country. They elected him.

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But of course, we've been extremely unfortunate because the expectation levels were extremely high. He came into power and really had great hopes of achieving great things and completely changing the way we do business in Nigeria. Similar to what this government experienced when it first came into power some seven years ago, faced with a global economic crisis of almost historic proportions, we also faced this oil price catastrophe – an economy that depended almost exclusively on oil, and we saw the oil prices drop precipitously from about \$140 to a barrel to almost \$30 to a barrel. And this government came on and bought in this situation.

Mr. President has outlined the vision and the priorities that he really feels will be able to get our country back to where it should be – a path of sustainable growth. And it's in that context that again we thank your government for being so cooperative and supportive in helping to establish this binational commission, a framework in which we could cooperate with the greatest economic power the world has ever seen to try to really kick start our economy, and really transform the way we do business in Nigeria and really lay the foundation for greater prosperity for our people.

And Mr. President identified the three priority areas of security. We know what Boko Haram has done and some of the other security challenges that we face. But here, again, we really cannot thank you enough, Mr. Secretary, and your government for the support that you've provided to us in engaging with the security challenges – enormous security challenges that we are facing.

Of course, as we have now seen, it is now a global phenomenon, the terrorism, and it's interlinked around the world. So our coming together, cooperating, to address that particular terrorist challenge is absolutely key and vital for the global community. And we cannot thank you enough for the support you have provided to us in that context.

And of course, we have almost 2 million displaced, internally displaced persons. So it's not just a question of engaging militarily with this threat, but we also have to think of the damage that they have caused to the country, the damage that has been caused when we need all the financial resources and material resources we can possibly lay our hands on for our development. So not only have we suffered from this catastrophic drop in oil prices, but we have this major insurgency situation that is also draining away a lot of our resources,

When Mr. President assumed office, he said that by the end of last year, 2015, he would have defeated Boko Haram – we would have done so. And technically and militarily, we have done, we have achieved that. And it's required great commitment and he's shown tremendous leadership in achieving this.

And what we do have now, though, is what we have in a number of countries around the world. As you have, again, mentioned, Mr. Secretary, suicide bombers are using young girls, strapping them up and having them blow up, blow themselves up in soft targets, marketplaces, using improvised explosive devices. And these are the kinds of challenges we're facing. We appreciate that to address those we would require different strategies, not just the direct military one. And so in addition, of course, to the military support that you have so kindly provided us with, we appreciate very much also the intelligence support that you're providing to us. And that's been extremely important.

We understand that we also have to tackle the root causes of this kind of radicalization. And so we're putting in place mechanisms to address that. And of course, we are discussing those at the moment in the framework of the binational commission. We've had extremely useful discussions on that. In fact, we started today on the security question. We've been really heartened by the concern, the support, and the engagement that has been shown by your government to us in this area. And we really look forward to charting a path that will see us completely eradicating this scourge on our people.

You've also mentioned, and correctly so, the question of the economy. Of course, as I said, we've been almost a mono economy, dependent almost exclusively on oil, which should really not have been the case. We really should have diversified such a long time ago. But we're now faced with this challenge, and we're really looking to diversify into other areas – agriculture, solid minerals, other extractive industries. We have to promote our manufacturing sector, and we have to look at sustainable economic growth. And for sustainable economic growth, we appreciate that we have to also develop a manufacturing base as well.

Foreign direct investment is absolutely key. We really have to do a lot more to make Nigeria an attractive place for business. We have to work on the new brand. Mr. President is absolutely determined to do that, to have a more transparent environment for foreign direct investment. And we're working extremely hard on putting in place all the building blocks that would enable us as a country to attract foreign direct investment. We're going to be discussing – excuse me – we're going to be discussing that later one with your colleagues to see really what more we need to be doing to attract and get more investments from your business community. Yesterday we met – we had a business roundtable with your chambers of commerce, and we're extremely gratified by how keen they are also to engage with us economically.

And, of course, on the – in the area of governance and democracy, we absolutely put great store by your words that it's just totally unacceptable – bribery in any form is not something that can be tolerated. We're dealing with a situation of endemic corruption, and our president, who, as I said, impersonates that total integrity, is absolutely keen to eradicate this culture of corruption, and really stopping at nothing – no stone will be left unturned – to achieve this.

And as you said very kindly, Nigeria is a country that's looked up to by all the other African countries. We have aspirations to be responsible and one of the leading countries globally. And for that we have to take on and assume various responsibilities, such as ensuring peace on the African continent in our peacekeeping role, promoting greater African integration, and helping to promote democracy across Africa. And of course, what we were able to achieve last year with our elections has really given us a platform. It's captured the imagination of countries around the world, and we really use – wish to leverage on that to also play a role in other African countries.

So Mr. Secretary, thank you very, very much indeed again for the wonderful support that you personally have provided to us, and to your President and your government. You mentioned your ambassador in Nigeria, who has also been a great source of support, and your assistant secretary for Africa. So we really enjoy and appreciate working with them, and we are seeing very concrete results and deliverables. We look forward to continue in this path.

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So thank you very much indeed, Secretary, for everything you've done.

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you, Geoffrey. (Applause.)

Thank you all. Now we have to go to work. (Laughter).

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